

*Beyond Alterity: German Encounters with Modern East Asia*. Ed. by Qinna Shen and Martin Rosenstock. New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2014, 306 pages

The book under review is the seventh volume in the series *Spektrum* published under the auspices of the German Studies Association. It is on “Asian German Studies”, a relatively new interdisciplinary field which defines itself as new transnational paradigm delineated by geography and not by chronological periodization. Its multiform ways are reflected in the various lines of inquiry presented and which are naturally not comprehensive. The focus of the essays is on meaningful engagement be it political, economic, or cultural between the German-speaking countries including Germany, Austria, and Switzerland on the one hand and China and Japan on the other and stretches from the imperialist era to contemporary times. The editors define this period as “a larger arc” spanning three centuries marked by the speed of transformations and characterized as “accelerated globalization” (p. 4). The multidisciplinary approach to explore the German socio-historical and aesthetic representations of these two East Asian countries takes into account various themes which have been on the agenda of recent academic debates on the intellectual and cultural relationship between East Asia and German-speaking countries. The twelve chapters are grouped in four sections which will be discussed according to the volume’s order.

The first section, entitled “Japan and Germany in the Shadow of National Socialism”, deals with forms of the interaction between the two Axis powers in the 1930s and 1940s. It presents cinematic and literary texts to assess the transnational relationship, analyzes genre conventions and ambivalent views of each other in films, and discusses forms of transcultural romanticism as exemplified in the activities of the *Deutsch-Japanische Gesellschaft* which sponsored the little-known essay contest in the spring of 1944 with the goal of reinforcing the German-Japanese alliance.

The second section, “From 1920s Leftist Collaboration to Global Capitalism”, looks into a broad sphere of cultural, political, and economic aspects portraying Chinese-German transnational connections in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It highlights the motives of Chinese students going to the Weimar Republic and also of German communists to take advantage of anti-imperial protests in China and its civil wars (1927-36) for their own political purposes. Documentary films on China produced by the German Democratic Republic (GDR) are examined to explore the relationship between the ideologically-driven politics and pragmatic interests of the East German government in its relations with Beijing. Concepts of a European identity set against the background of present-day Western fears about China’s increasing global status are investigated in a German historical novel of 2008 about the Boxer Rebellion of 1900.

The third section, “Negotiating Identity in Multicultural Germany”, demonstrates the actual presence of hybrid Asian-German identities in the German-speaking countries since the early decades of the twentieth century to the present. The cultural activities of Asian artists are the main focus when exploring the German films of the Chinese actress Anna May Wong during the Weimar Republic or when examining Yoko Tawada's 1989 novella, “The Bath”. The latter gives a materially feminist perspective in the deconstruction of the bio-political territorialization of gender images in post-1945 Japan and West Germany.

The fourth section, “Trade, Travel, and Ethnographical Narratives”, delves into economic and cultural encounters shaping Western perceptions of East Asia. In contrast to earlier sections, the chapters deal with tangible interactions such as the hairnet manufacturing industries in a

specific region in China and in Austria-Hungary, later Czechoslovakia, as interlinked and dependent on each other to a certain degree. The case study reveals that globalization caused economic transformations in both regions leading to different consequences for individuals and families. Japanese culture is the main focus of short texts of German and Austrian authors, which concentrates on the difficulties in encountering the otherness of Asia. And finally the works of the Swiss writer Hugo Loetscher are examined, whose texts show the attempt to connect East and West as complementary elements of a global culture but not as opposites, something that the book indeed presents as generic theme in a number of its contributions.

All in all, this is an impressive collection of scholarly achievements that Asian German Studies has made in recent years. Focusing on the interactions between the German-speaking world and China and Japan, this new field has, to a certain extent, caught up with research done in the English-speaking world, especially by North American Germanists who have demonstrated a keener interest in these transnational connections. The broad timeline in which most chapters explore their themes reveals the far-reaching interaction between both regions, and also illustrate the different regime changes occurring to a certain degree in a simultaneous manner in the concerned countries, with their severe impacts on artistic and socio-economic output. Naturally an essay collection presents a scattered picture of past and present realities. Therefore any criticism or suggestions as far as content is concerned would be for a call for similar works that perhaps address the Asian-German relationship from the Asian perspective. Yet the disproportion between nine chapters dealing with literature and film, and three chapters on politics, society, and economy, is evidence of the fact that historians, political scientists, or economists concerned with transnational connections usually publish their works elsewhere. Under these circumstances Asian German Studies will probably remain mainly a field for Germanists with an interest in the creative industries and individuals with their intercultural influences in both regions. That this new subfield within German Studies offers a multitude of topics worthy of further study is made clear by this volume which can be regarded an important contribution to our knowledge and understanding of German-East Asian relations.

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